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AUTHOR Wadlow, Joan K.; Duly, Leslie C.
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ABSTRACT

Assessment strategies that colleges and universities design to evaluate the effectiveness of their academic programs should be compatible with other institutional improvement strategies. This paper stems from work done by the Outcomes Assessment Project in International Education, a project that attempts to assist institutions in measuring the effectiveness of their commitment and resources in meeting objectives in international education. The question of how educational assessment fits with other institutional strategies is addressed; assessment programs in international education are used as the focal point. Assessment strategy should be integrated into planning, priorities, and program reviews. Such integration should accomplish three important objectives. It should: (1) link assessment to the budget process; (2) integrate the cost of assessment into program evaluation; and (3) enable faculty and administrators to capitalize on institutional strengths and select areas for improvement where cost effectiveness can be demonstrated. In regard to international study, two components of an assessment strategy can serve to demonstrate the importance of institutional integration. The first component is assessment of knowledge of international affairs; the second is self-reporting by students of their non-classroom activities. Advantages of integrating assessment of international education competence into institutional improvement strategies are the following: faculty recognize assessment to be an integral part of program development and improvement; resources can be redirected to programs that will have maximum impact; and new options to achieve greater international competence can be identified. (DB)

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BAsed on Paper Presented at The American Forum
on Education and International Competence
St. Louis, 1988

Joan K. Wadlow
University of Oklahoma

Leslie C. Duly
Bemikji State University

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Joan K. Wadlow
University of Oklahoma

Leslie C. Duly
Bemidji State University

As colleges and universities design assessment strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of their academic programs, they should make the assessment programs compatible with other institutional strategies for improvement. This is a key premise of the Outcomes Assessment Project in International Education being conducted by four schools: Bemidji State University in Minnesota, Austin Peay State University in Tennessee, the University of Oklahoma, and Ramapo College of New Jersey. Initiated in August 1987 with the assistance of Global Perspectives in Education, the Project attempts to assist institutions measure the effectiveness of their commitment and resources in meeting objectives in international education. This paper concentrates on the <u>place</u> of the assessment strategy within the individual institution. Specifically, how does it "fit" with other institutional strategies? The international education assessment approach which we propose is designed to be mainstreamed into institutional strategies of planning, priorities, and program review.

Integrating the assessment strategy into planning, priorities, and program reviews should accomplish three objectives which many institutions considered to be important indicators of quality. First, it should link assessment to a budget process; this should contribute to better use of resources, increasingly limited in most institutions. It also integrates the cost of assessment into program evaluation, instead of making assessment an

"add on" to be budgeted separately. Next, it enables faculty and administrators to capitalize on institutional strengths and select areas for improvement where cost effectiveness can be demonstrated. Additionally, by mainstreaming assessment it is likely that more faculty support will be secured. If faculty can be persuaded to treat supplemental forms of assessment as important efforts to document the value that students get from their undergraduate education, and not another administratively imposed demand on their time, experience suggests that assessment strategies will not be resisted. If they are seen as part of ongoing program development and improvement, i.e., as part of the institution's program review processes, discussions can then be redirected to issues which address the improvement of the learning environment -- good teaching. It is likely that faculty will then accept the assessment strategy even if they do not enthusiastically embrace it.

Two components of an assessment strategy can serve to demonstrate the importance of institutional integration. The first is assessment of knowledge about international affairs. Assume, for instance, that an assessment project discloses that journalism majors have serious deficiencies in their knowledge about international affairs. On many campuses journalism is one of the most popular majors. As these students have the potential to make an enormous impact on society and society's global awareness, the importance of acquiring sufficient global awareness cannot be overstated. Assume further that an institution has set a low priority for new funding in journalism, including new faculty positions. Perhaps higher priorities have been assigned to improvements in mathematics and music, for example. Therefore, recruiting new

faculty who could bring international expertise to the program is not a viable option. A proposal to send a significant number of journalism students overseas is not a viable option because of the cost and lack of scholarships to underwrite such an effort. So what institutional responses are available? The starting point should be an examination of the strengths of the institution. Assume that a strength of the institution has been its faculty/staff development programs. Therefore, in view of the newly discovered evidence about the global awareness deficiency of journalism students, through assessment techniques, the institution might give highest priority to faculty/staff development proposals which would have an immediate impact on the internationalization of the journalism curriculum or in expanding international activities for the journalism majors. Or, assume that the institution has an outstanding visiting lecture series. One way to capitalize on this strength in addressing a newly identified deficiency, is to place highest priority for use of the lectureship funds to bring in international visitors and insist that each one meets with journalism majors while visiting the campus.

Finally, it is likely that every institution has a pool of one-time money to be expended yearly; this could be expended on programs of strength as a direct response to the findings of the assessment of journalism majors. It is worth noting that what has been described as a possible scenario for journalism majors might just as easily have been used for business majors.

In summary, the administration can integrate the findings from the assessment into institutional planning and priorities, and allocate accordingly.

A second component of the assessment project is the self-reporting by students of the activities they engage in where they are not in the classroom. In the International Education Assessment Project this self-reporting is called an Activities Inventory. Many studies of undergraduate education stress that much student learning takes place outside the classroom. It therefore seems useful to know what students are doing outside the classroom as well as to ask students where and how they have been learning about international affairs. Even if we acknowledge there is a small margin of error in self-reporting, it seems reasonable to assume that the self-reporting is an improvement over pure speculation. The self-reporting Activities Inventory in the current Project becomes a tool for program improvement. At the University of Oklahoma, a standard step in each program review is to administer a survey to current students and former students. As the institution customizes the standardized tests to meet its own needs, the assessment of international competency can become an integral part of another institutional strategy.

The following sample question illustrates what might be used in a self-reporting Activities Inventory. The student would rank on a scale of one to five each of six possible responses to the question: "The thing you did that most helped you understand what is <u>really</u> <u>important</u> to a people of a <u>culture</u> <u>unlike</u> <u>yours</u>?"

A. You lived in a culture unlike your own -- at least several months-- such as a neighborhood in your home city in which the prevailing culture was unlike your own;

B. You came into frequent, regular contacts for long periods of time with members of a culture unlike yours -- possibly working in a public agency serving persons from cultures unlike your own -- or you attended a school where most persons were from another culture;

C. You visited another country for a brief period -- several days-- maybe a conference or visiting with a family in another part of the U.S. where the general life style was unlike your own;

D. Without leaving your own culture, you established a close relationship with a member of a culture unlike your own -- maybe an international student;

E. You gained information about another culture indirectly or casually, e.g., book, conversation, TV.

F. You participated in a simulated exercise such as a model United Nations.

An analysis of responses to these situations can be used to identify activities that have contributed to the students' international competence. For example, if the institution has a strong internship program, additional placements could be made available in areas where students would work with people of a different culture than their own. If the institution has an artist-in-residence program, care could be taken to ensure that the artist (or scientist, etc.) comes from a different culture. Students in the Honors Program could be paired with an international student to help him or her

participate in campus events during a semester. Work-study students and graduate assistants could escort international visitors who come to campus. Recent graduates representing another culture can be brought back to visit with students on the subject "How It Was--How It Is...." An institutional policy can be started to ensure that every international visitor on campus meets with and works with students. In short, a campus can match the findings from the Activities Inventory about activities that are increasing international competency, with strong institutional programs so that international competency is increased. In this way the results of the assessment program are compatible with institutional strategies for improvement.

In summary, the advantages of integrating assessment of international education competence into institutional improvement strategies are: The faculty will recognize assessment to be an integral part of program development and improvement; resources can be redirected to programs which will have the maximum impact; and new options to achieve greater international competence can be identified.